

## Message Text

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46

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 ACDA-05 MC-02 AID-05 IGA-02

EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 COME-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 EUR-12 AF-06 SCCT-01 /098 W

----- 086476

P R 291400Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4303

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY MEXICO CITY

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 0593

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, XM

SUBJECT: REGIONAL STUDY ON CONVENTIONAL ARMS RESTRAINTS

REF: STATE 015423

1. GIVEN BELOW ARE EMBASSY RESPONSES TO QUERIES IN PARA TWO OF REFTEL. RESPONSES REFLECT ARGENTINE POINTS OF VIEW AND LIKELY POINTS OF VIEW ONLY. THE REACTION OF OTHER SOUTHERN CONE COUNTRIES MAY BE QUITE DIFFERENT.

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2. FACTORS FAVORING. (A) ARGENTINA IS ENCOUNTERING SERIOUS

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, INCLUDING A STAGGERING DEFICIT IN THE BUDGET. THE GOA MIGHT THEREFORE BE INTERESTED IN REDUCING ARMS SPENDING IF POLITICAL AND SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS PERMITTED. (B) ARGENTINA IS INCREASINGLY AT A MILITARY DISADVANTAGE VIS-A-VIS BRAZIL AND MIGHT SEE SOME ADVANTAGES TO A REGIONAL FREEZE WHICH WOULD BLOCK BRAZIL FROM INCREASING IT LEAD.

3. OBSTACLES. (A) THE ARGENTINE MILITARY AND SECURITY FORCES ARE LOCKED IN WHAT THEY REGARD AS A LIFE AND DEATH STRUGGLE WITH THE TERRORISTS. AT THIS POINT IN TIME THEY WOULD REGARD ANY RESTRAINTS UPON THE LEVELS OF ARMS AVAILABLE TO THEM WITH UTMOST HOSTILITY. THEY BELIEVE THEY NEED MORE (AND MORE SOPHISTICATED) ARMS TO DEFEAT INTERNAL SUBVERSION, NOT LESS. (B) SEVERAL ARGENTINES HAVE MENTIONED WITH CONCERN THE SIZE OF THE CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA. THE LESSONS THEY ARE DRAWING FROM IT ARE THAT OTHER LA COUNTRIES MAY NEED BIGGER AND MORE MODERNIZED ARMED FORCES TO COUNTER THE CUBAN THREAT AND THAT THEY CANNOT COUNT ON THE US TO ASSIST THEM AGAINST THAT THREAT. (C) FURTHER, ARGENTINA PERCEIVES SITUATION IN ANGOLA AS LEADING TO NEW SOVIET PRESENCE IN SOUTH ATLANTIC--A PRESENCE THE ARGENTINE ARMED FORCES, ESPECIALLY THE NAVY, WILL HAVE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT IN THEIR CALCULATIONS OF DEFENSE POSTURE AND ARMS LEVELS. (D) IN GENERAL TERMS, ARGENTINA WOULD REACT NEGATIVELY TO ANY ARRANGEMENTS WHICH SEEMED TO REDUCE HER SOVEREIGNTY AND ABILITY TO ACT FREELY IN HER OWN DEFENSE.

4. SUBREGIONAL APPROACHES. ARGENTINA WOULD BE SOMEWHAT MORE LIKELY TO RESPOND FAVORABLY TO AN APPROACH WHICH EMPHASIZED HER POSITION AS A KEY COUNTRY IN THE HEMISPHERE (A POSITION CONCERNING WHICH SHE IS INCREASINGLY SENSITIVE AND WITH RESPECT TO WHICH SHE NOW HAS SOME SELF DOUBTS BECAUSE OF HER OWN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC MALAISE). A BIG SEVEN, SAY, COMPOSED OF MEXICO, VENEZUELA, COLOMBIA, BRASIL, ARGENTINA, CHILE AND PERU MIGHT POSSIBLY APPEAL TO ARGENTINA'S EGO AND WOULD BE ATTRACTIVE IN A MORE PRACTICAL SENSE IN THAT IT WOULD ALSO HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OF INCLUDING ALL THE NEIGHBORS SHE IS PRINCIPALLY CONCERNED WITH IN HER DEFENSE CALCULATIONS. NO ARRANGEMENT WOULD BE SATISFACTORY TO ARGENTINA UNLESS SHE SAW IN IT SOME ADVANTAGE WITH RESPECT TO HER POSITION VIS-A-VIS BRAZIL. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, A BILATERAL ARRANGEMENT WHICH PLACED RESTRAINTS ONLY ON BRAZIL AND

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ARGENTINA WOULD PROBABLY NOT REPEAT NOT BE SATISFACTORY SINCE THAT WOULD LEAVE CHILE (WHICH MOST ARGENTINES REGARD AS A PERENIALLY POTENTIAL ALLY OF BRAZIL) UNFETTERED.

5. SENSITIVITY TO US LEAD. ALL US EFFORTS TO PERSUADE ARGENTINA TO SIGN THE NPT HAVE MET WITH THE RESPONSE THAT THIS REPRESENTS THE ARMED, I.E., THE US AND USSR, TRYING TO PERSUADE THE UNARMED TO DISARM STILL FURTHER. ARGENTINA WOULD DOUBTLESS REACT IN MUCH

THE SAME WAY TO A US LEAD REGARDING CONVENTIONAL ARMS. SHE WOULD REGARD IT AS PATERNALISTIC AND HYPOCRITICAL ON OUR PART AND AS DESIGNED TO KEEP LA IN A STATE OF INFERIORITY. SHE MIGHT ALSO CHARGE THAT WE WOULD BE ASKING ARGENTINA TO REDUCE, FREEZE OR PLACE CEILINGS ON ITS ARMS LEVELS PRECISELY AT A TIME WHEN IT CAN COUNT LESS AND LESS ON US SUPPORT OR SECURITY GUARANTEES (AS DEMONSTRATED, THEY WOULD DOUBTLESS POINT OUT, BY OUR INABILITY TO HELP ANGOLA). THE ARGENTINE MILIARY TEND TO BE DISAPPOINTED BY OUR RELUCTANCE OR INABILITY TO ASSIST THEM IN THEIR STRUGGLE WITH THE TERRORISTS/GUERRILLAS. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, FOR THE US TO TAKE THE LEAD IN SUGGESTING ARMS RESTRAINTS WOULD PROBABLY BE REGARDED AS CHEEKY INDEED. IT WOULD BE FAR BETTER FOR US TO WORK THROUGH ONE OR MORE FRIENDLY LA GOVTS.

6. MOST FEASIBLE APPROACH. PROSPECTS FOR RESTRAINTS IN ARGENTINA ARE UNPROMISING AT BEST AND NON-ACQUISITION OR OUTRIGHT DISARMAMENT WOULD NOT EVEN BE CONSIDERED. THERE MIGHT BE SOME INTEREST, HOWEVER, IN SETTING CEILINGS. THE CATNIP WOULD BE THE LIMITATIONS THEREBY IMPOSED ON BRAZILIAN (AND CHILEAN) EXPANSION. EVEN SO, THE CEILINGS FOR ARGENTINA WOULD HAVE TO BE HIGH ENOUGH SO THT THE ARGENTINE ARMED FORCES WOULD NOT FEEL HAMSTRUNG IN THEIR EFFORTS TO INCREASE THEIR CAPABILITIES AGAINST INTERNAL SUBVERSION.

7. IN OUR VIEW, PROSPECTS FOR ARMS RESTRAINTS ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE PROMISING UNTIL A MUCH HIGHER DEGREE OF LATIN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY AND HARMONY ARE ACHIEVED (IF THEY EVER ARE). THIS POINTS UP AGAIN THE FACT THAT WHILE THERE ARE ALSO SOME LOSSES AND DANGERS IMPLIED FOR THE US, LA UNITY WOULD SERVE BASIC US INTERESTS. WE SHOULD THERFORE SUPPORT (OR CONTINUE TO SUPPORT) INITIATIVES WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO A BALANCED AND LEGITIMATE UNITY.

8. ARGENTINA WOULD REGARD TERMINATION OR FURTHER REDUCTION OF  
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US FOREIGN SECURITY ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE TO IT AS INCOMPREHENSIBLE AND GRATUITOUS AND AS SIMPLY REINFORCING THE ALREADY INCREASINGLY PREVALENT VIEW THAT US SECURITY GUARANTEES ARE NOT RELIABLE AND THAT ARGENTINA MUST LOOK ELSEWHERE FOR AN ASSURED SOURCE OF ARMS.  
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